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ABSTRACT

This publication completes the series that focuses on the five groups of persons involved in the educational "ministry" of the Catholic school. Based on a survey of pastors and diocesan and archdiocesan superintendents of concerns related to the pastor and his role within the school community, this essay discusses seven areas of pastoral concern regarding the school. Financing the school is one of the pastors' concerns. Three others touch on relationships: working with the principal, relating the school to the total parish community, and working with parental groups and boards. Two other interests involve research: pastors are concerned about religious education trends and current research on Catholic education. A seventh area of interest is that of worship with children. (MLF)

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Pastor as Shepherd of the School Community

Rev. John R. Gilbert

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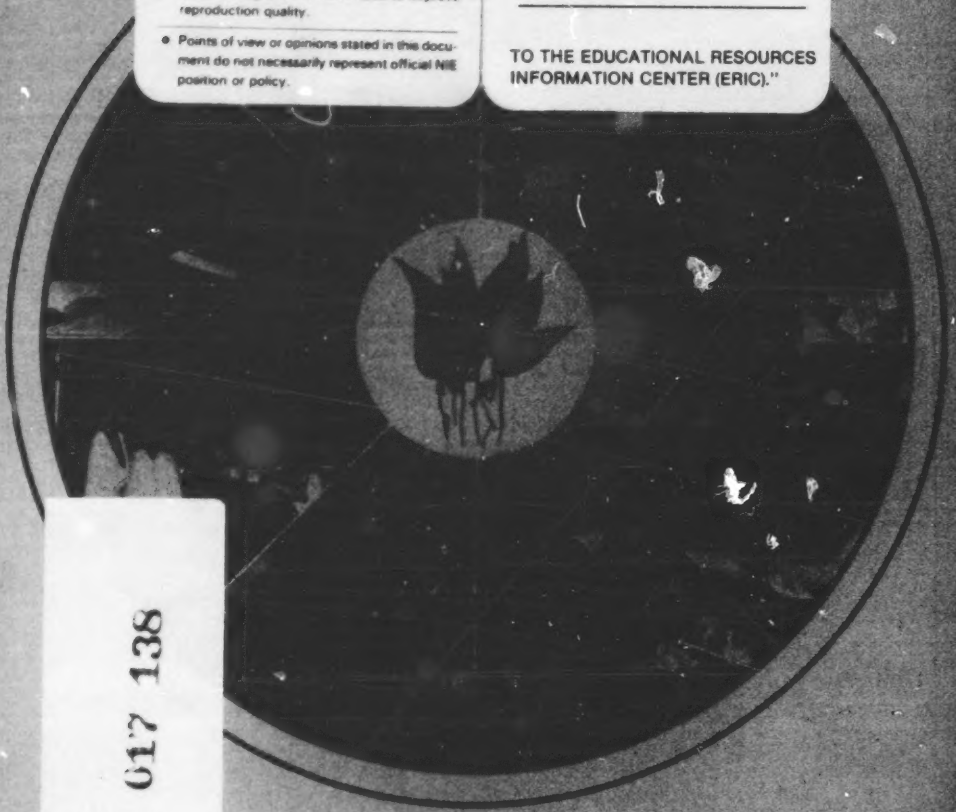

EA 017 138

OF THE SCHOOL
COMMUNITY

Pastor as Shepherd of the School Community

prepared for the NCEA
Department of Elementary Schools

by

Reverend John R. Gilbert

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Preface

Principal as Prophet
Teacher as Minister
Student as Disciple
Parent as Witness

Pastor as Shepherd of the School Community completes the series which focuses on the five groups of persons involved in the educational ministry of the Catholic school. The NCEA Department of Elementary Schools is pleased to present this present volume, focused on the pastor—a key partner in the Catholic school community.

What are the major concerns related to the pastor and his role with the school community? Special thanks are due to Rev. Theodore L. Wojcicki who surveyed pastors and arch/diocesan superintendents to determine which pastor-school concerns ranked highest; this publication is based on those concerns. We also wish to thank all those who responded to the survey, assisted with its compilation (especially Jeff Brandt), or were involved in any other work preliminary to this manuscript (including Rev. Dan Danielson, Rev. Douglas Doussan, Msgr. James Gaffey, Msgr. John Leibrecht, Msgr. John A. Mihan, Rev. Stephen O'Brien, Rev. Patrick O'Neill, and Most Rev. Francis Quinn). We appreciate the encouragement of the National Organization for Continuing Education of Roman Catholic Clergy (NOCERCC) and the support of Most Rev. John S. Cummins, Chairman of the NCEA Board of Directors.

A subcommittee of the Elementary Department Executive Committee steered and critiqued the project through its development: Chairperson, Sr. Dorothy Wilson, SCN; Wallace J. Dunne; Sr. Lucille Hass, OSF; Bro. Robert J. Kealey, FSC; Sr. Frances Elizabeth McDonnell, OP; Rev. John Pollard; and Sr. M. Ignatius Rooney, RSM. Many thanks to these members who devoted much time to this project. We also wish to thank Sr. Ann Redmond, CSJ, for her editorial suggestions and Mrs. Wendy Tavenner Royston, Administrative Secretary of the Department of Elementary Schools, who assisted throughout the development and publication of this manuscript.

Our special gratitude to Rev. John R. Gilbert, a pastor who speaks honestly, questions openly, and thinks creatively. We thank him—not only for this manuscript—but for his modeling of the role of pastor as shepherd of the school community. We are also grateful to the Knights of Columbus for partial funding of the development of this publication

through the Fr. Michael J. McGivney Memorial Fund for New Initiatives in Catholic Education.

Finally—in the name of the millions of young people who receive the benefits of Catholic education—we wish to thank all pastors who are shepherds of our school communities and all those who support that educational ministry.

Bro. Robert J. Kealey, FSC
President

Sr. Ca:ieen Reck, SSND
Executive Director

Department of Elementary Schools
National Catholic Educational Association

Foreword

Father John A. Gilbert has written a very contemporary document. It is timely and fresh as it is also wide-ranging and exact, dealing with the blessings and the trials of current leadership and the learning that goes on for all nowadays in the developing relations of pastor, principal, parents, staff, volunteers and students.

The book is up to date in its information and its professionalism. It touches on expected subjects such as the evaluation of the strength of a pastor's support of a school and the contribution of his own gifts and skills, but it touches, too, on such subjects as the pastor's role in liturgy, the lawful expectations he may have from diocesan offices and the place of the school in total ministry of the parish.

The author has taken our great tradition and analyzed it in the present context. Furthermore, he has done it in that heritage of the psalmist, "you will show me the path to life, fullness of joys in your presence, the delights at your right hand." He is able to offer encouraging words about manageable responsibilities and a healthy future. The book is unselfconsciously prayerful and relaxedly human. It should meet with appreciation.

† John S. Cummins
Bishop of Oakland and
Chairman, NCEA Board of Directors

Table of Contents

Introduction ix

- Areas of concern
- Setting for these concerns
- Order of this study
- A notice to the reader

1 *Consulting the Faithful* 1

- Training for ministry
- Limited time, limited energy
- Board and staff tension

2 *The Pastor and the Principal* 7

- The pastor's role
- The principal's role
- Trust, the basic attitude
- Hiring the principal
- Renewing or terminating the principal's contract

3 *The Pastor and the School Board* 17

- Must the pastor be a member of the school board?
- Must the pastor be present for board meetings?
- Trust despite mistakes

4 *Relating to Parental Groups* 23

- Support
- Referral

5 *Relating the School to the Total Parish* 27

- The parish staff
- Equal treatment
- One-issue parishioners
- The school gets all the money

6 *Worship with Children* 33
Quality rather than quantity
Ways of worship
Celebrating the sacraments

7 *Research and Development* 41
Schools are a good ministry
Schools are wanted
Schools are not available
More important in change
They will be lay schools
Religious education trends

8 *Financing the Schools* 45
Planning and communication
School development directors
The parish development director
Sacrificial giving
An opportunity

9 *Conclusion* 51

Introduction

The title, pastor as shepherd, is a symbol. It does not speak of parishioners as sheep. The shepherd symbol rather conveys the image of a person who cares about others, whose life is centered on the care of the community.

This particular reflection centers on the pastor's care for the school community. Again, this does not imply that he is uncaring for the liturgy, the catechumens, persons out of work, those experiencing sickness, divorce or death. It is no secret that the pastor's concern involves a wide range of persons and needs. The focus here, however, is on his shepherding of the school community.

Areas of Concern

A survey of superintendents and pastors in December, 1981, identified seven areas of pastoral concern regarding the school.

No one will be surprised to learn that financing the school is one of the pastor's concerns. Three others touch on relationships: working with the principal, relating the school to the total parish community, and working with parental groups and boards. Two other interests involve research: pastors are concerned about religious education trends and current research on Catholic education. A seventh area of interest is that of worship with children.

Setting for These Concerns

The American parish priest today experiences his concerns in a specific setting. Generalizations are only that. The rural pastor in western South Dakota knows ministry in a different way from the Detroit city pastor. Even common elements in the American pastoral setting are experienced with greater or lesser differences.

One common concern is the smaller number of diocesan priests in ministry. We were 40,000; we are 30,000; within fifteen years, we will be 20,000. This is a central reflection in coming to terms with ordained ministry today.

Another is a policy matter: few, if any, new parishes are building schools. This means that our existing schools will be our schools of the 1990's. We will have to keep them in good repair and plan essential maintenance work. Population shifts will be important to the stability of this ministry and diocesan offices would do well to spend time keeping abreast of these patterns and changes.

A third concern is the growing volume of parish ministry. Increasing numbers of parishes are providing evening meals for hundreds of persons as well as overnight shelter for the homeless. Support groups for the bereaved and others for the divorced and separated are meeting real and growing needs. Parishes are working to integrate the handicapped into their life and ministry; they are providing adults with places and opportunities to reflect on world peace, the arms race, abortion, prison reform and other problems which reflect our culture's loss of respect for persons and their dignity. Liturgy continues to be the focal point for priestly ministry, and we have much to do in enabling our liturgies to be vehicles for the Word of God to come alive. Besides, recent episcopal statements have directed us to work much more in the area of evangelization and in that of family life.

Regardless of individual differences, the parish setting within which we experience our concern for the school is one of a smaller number of ordained, a burgeoning of ministerial concerns, and growing pressure on limited finances.

If the odds seem stacked against us, we have a history to support our ministry: since the days of Mother Seton, we have had so many critical periods in our American Catholic school experience that we have been able to develop a toughness which serves us well in daily ministry and life. It is the strength of the Holy Spirit which enables each of us to minister, and his strength will not be wanting.

Order of This Study

While finances emerge as the first concern of pastors, this reflection begins at another point. Finances should never be, in parish ministry, the tail that wags the dog; other concerns are more central, more basic. Finances are more a sign and an effect of good health or bad in the community of faith than its cause. Our reflection should recognize that reality.

Our shepherding of the school requires that we call the community of faith to reflect on its future, on the direction in which the Spirit is now calling it to move. Parishioners must have a future to support and they must have a voice in that future: we must consult the faithful if we are going to shepherd the school or any other ministry in the parish.

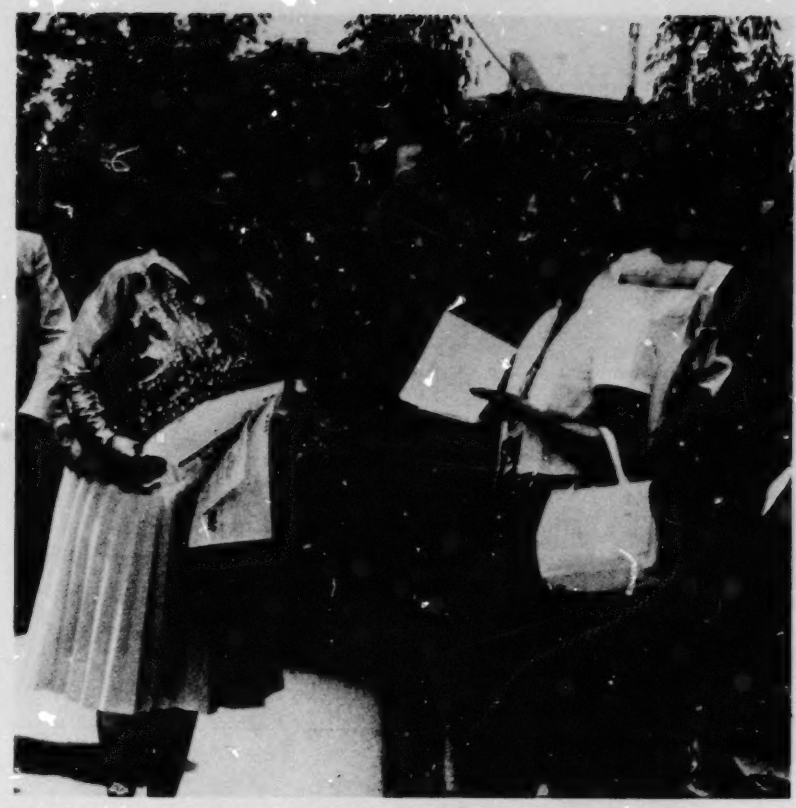
Thus our initial and major reflection is on consulting the faithful. This will easily lead us to pastoral concerns about relationships with the principal, the board and parental groups, the school as an integral part of the entire parish community. Worship with children will be a separate concern, as will the pastoral questions about research and Catholic education. While aspects of financing will appear at various points in the study, we will end with a more complete reflection on this area of ministry.

A Notice to the Reader

Considered as a whole, the ideas presented here constitute a pastoral reflection: this is an essay in pastoral theology, grounded in pastoral experience.

The value of this kind of writing is not so much in the ideas that are presented as it is in the reflection and discussion of our present practices which it generates. "Semper reformanda" is not a new idea in the Catholic community nor is it a product of the Second Vatican Council. Rather, it is a call to all of us who have the privilege of sharing pastoral ministry to reflect on what we are doing as we continually try to improve our ways of proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ.

A central purpose of pastoral theology is to help us think about what we are doing. The ideas expressed in the following pages try to serve that purpose.



Rev. John H. Ricard, SSJ, with several parishioners.

1

Consulting the Faithful

As a theologically important source of reflection, consulting the faithful is not a new idea: Cardinal Newman wrote persuasively on the "consensus fidelium" in the 19th century, and the early history of the church was his major reference point. In our day, the Second Vatican Council has been the font of renewed reflection on this theological source of church vision.

Consulting the faithful supposes a vision of the church in which one respects the dignity of the baptized person and sees the Holy Spirit alive and active in the community of the baptized assembled in prayer and thought. In this view, baptism rather than ordination is the call to active ministry. The ordained person remains a central leader and he calls members of the community to listen to one another. The Word of God is the one we follow and so Jesus Christ and his revelation remain normative: we listen first to the Lord. Within the context of the Word and the obedience to the apostles and their successors which it encompasses, the local community of faith, enlivened with the Holy Spirit, discerns his call, his direction, his challenge to the community. Hence, the local pastor, in shepherding his community, is called to assemble the baptized and confirmed in prayer and reflection, and, with and through them, to hear the voice of the Spirit.

In practice, this implies a pastoral role different from that of twenty or thirty years ago: rather than making all the decisions, the pastor is called to assemble members of the community and call them to prayer and

reflection on these decisions. It further implies, especially in the beginning, that the pastor mute his voice while parishioners learn to speak their thoughts on the ways in which the parish community is called to grow in fidelity to the Gospel.

Training for Ministry

This pastoral listening is religiously based: the Holy Spirit is alive in the People of God as together they journey toward the Lord. It does, however, require a pastoral ministry of its own.

Thus, for example, one cannot assume that persons have an innate knowledge of decision-making processes which assures that more than just one or two voices in the community will be heard. Workshops, in-service education, leadership training are necessary if this listening to the Holy Spirit in the community is to be more than a facade.

Nor can we assume that persons have an intense understanding of liturgy, religious education principles, the dynamics of youth ministry or the principles of social justice espoused by the church which they constitute. Opportunities for education in these areas have to be provided.

Nor can we assume that Catholics who have not been used to making decisions in their community of faith will all at once become active participants: just as we have to work patiently to develop active participation in our liturgy, so do we have to work to develop active sharing in parish life and ministry. Here, the pastor's attitude and support are very important.

Nor can we assume that we pastors have all the skills we need to develop shared ministry and shared decision-making within the parish community: the diocese is called to sponsor in-service education for us so that we can learn to lead in today's church.

If all of this seems to have little to do with shepherding the school ministry, that is only an appearance: it has everything to do with this ministry. The healthy school today requires a healthy parish climate, and developing this healthy climate is very much a part of the pastor's role.

Limited Time, Limited Energy

While the Second Vatican Council, in its teaching on the nature of the church, encourages the baptized to share their gifts in ministry, another phenomenon has overtaken us in the American Catholic community: we have 10,000 fewer diocesan priests than we had fifteen years ago, and projections anticipate a similar decline before the end of the century.

While the church wrestles with the "vocation question," it is clear that parishes will have to face new situations in the future: some will have non-ordained leadership on a day-to-day basis, others will have to share together the ministry of a single priest, and still others, of larger size, will have to get along with one priest instead of two or three.

Every real situation we face is a call from the Spirit for adaptation: sometimes, the pages of life teach us more forcefully than the pages of conciliar documents. It is clear today that non-ordained persons are being called to leadership in the ministry of the local churches.

Some will be members of the parish staff and the ministry will be their full-time profession. Others will be volunteers giving a portion of their gift of time and talent to the local church. In either case, the new picture emerging in the parish is one of shared ministry and shared decision making.

Today's pastor, looking to the good of his parish, has to limit his time and energy: he simply cannot do what two priests were doing five years ago. That would be good neither for him nor for the parish. Reality today tells us both to invite young men to ordained ministry and, at the same time, to invite others to share the present work of ministry with us.

In a real sense, the pastor who does less for his parish today is doing more for the community because he is calling others to minister with him.

With his time and energy limited and with others joining in both ministry and decision making, the parish priest must not try to attend every meeting nor should the community expect him to do so. Often, parish priests find their day of ministry under way by 6:30 in the morning and continuing until 9:30 or later in the evening. It is both unrealistic and unnecessary for them to accompany their religious education director or school principal to all of their board meetings: these are trusted co-workers in parish ministry, pastors, if you will, in their own areas of ministry. It is equally absurd to assume that the parish priest will have to begin every parish meeting with prayer: surely, with thousands of baptized and confirmed members in the community, others can learn to lead prayer with great dignity and beauty.

Nor is it proper for me, as a pastor, to spend great amounts of time and energy worrying about the errors or mistakes that one board or another can make. More to the point is time spent in reflection on the decision-making process in the parish to assure sufficient consultation and discussion, and thus to permit the community to discern the call of the Spirit regarding any one of its decisions.

Board and Staff Tension

From time to time, tension will arise between the board that is setting policy in a given area of parish ministry and the staff person or persons engaged in directing that ministry: one will sense the Spirit calling the community to move in a certain direction and the other will not.

These moments of tension are learning experiences, moments of growth: they call us to study more deeply, reflect more seriously, before moving ahead. A community always void of tension may be a static community or else one dominated by one powerful voice or another. Neither is a healthy community even if, for a time, good things seem to be happening.

A school board, for example, dominated by a powerful principal is not healthy for the school, even if that principal is an excellent educational leader. A parish council similarly dominated by a powerful pastor who tells the council it is free to make its decision—but then proceeds to speak at great length either for or against a given action—is not a healthy council. Domination is one way of handling tension, but it has the effect of stifling the voice of the Spirit speaking through the baptized and confirmed members of the community. One hears the echo of Archie Bunker, saying to his beloved, "Stifle yourself!" This shrill voice may solve a given problem but, on a deeper level, the tension in the parish family continues.

Nor is it healthy to have a powerful board dominating a principal, pastor, or parish minister: domination in any form will not bring about a healthy parish community. Rather, we are called to listen for the voice of the Spirit as that voice emerges from the discussion, carried on in mutual respect, between staff and board and among board members. Prayerful listening is the chief quality that will assure our growth as a parish community, just as it is in each of our personal lives: we are called to listen prayerfully to the Word of God as we discern his call to become his people.

Rev. John Gilbert with Principal Sr. Lucille Hass, OSF.

2

The Pastor and the Principal

Within a local community of shared ministry and shared decision-making, both pastor and principal have important ministries. In this section, we would like to outline their respective roles, reflect on the basic attitude of trust which is essential to their cooperative ministry, discuss a hiring procedure which is very important to the parish community seeking a principal, and conclude with some remarks on the situation in which the renewal of the contract of the principal—or that of any other staff member—is in question.

The Pastor's Role

Within a staff of shared ministry, the principal is the "pastor" of the school: she or he is the person responsible and accountable to the staff, the school board, and ultimately to the parish council for this ministry.

Clearly, then, the role of the pastor of the parish is not to make all the decisions about the life of the school. The school principal is much more than his administrative arm. In parishes with an associate pastor, that person shares in the role of the pastor as the two of them agree. What then is the role of the pastor of the parish?

First, the pastor is to support the principal in the ministry of leading the school. This implies that the pastor is available to the principal for any reflecting or sharing that the latter wishes to do regarding school policy, problems or direction.

Given the scheduling problems that we all meet, this, in turn, implies that the pastor and principal should establish regular meeting times, at least monthly, to allow for this support, encouragement and reflection on the ministry of the school.

Second, the pastor should allow the principal to consider him as "an associate of the principal;" that is, the pastor should set an environment in which the principal feels free to call upon him to perform any tasks which they both agree are fitting for him to perform based on his gifts and time and the needs of the school community.

In this area, the problem of expectations is a very real one: from previous experience, either the pastor or the principal may have a set of ideas about the ministry of the pastor in the school. It is important to express these expectations verbally: it is not only in marriage that role expectations which are unexpressed cause needless problems.

The pastor should feel free to express himself if he senses an expectation on the part of the principal which he cannot fulfill: a principal may, for example, want the pastor to be on the playground during recess periods or at the lunch hour; he may be expected to teach a regular class or handle school discipline problems. He, on the other hand, may feel that he lacks the time, training or talent for one of these roles or he may feel that one or another of them simply does not fit with his overall role as pastor of the parish community. It is important to talk about these differences and reach a resolution that is acceptable to both persons and thus avoid the conflict that comes from unfulfilled expectations.

In this role as "associate of the principal" for the school ministry, the pastor should try to share his gifts and make them known to the principal: he may be an excellent classroom teacher, a gifted counselor; he may be of great assistance in helping teachers learn how to prepare liturgies with their students, in working with parents on sacramental preparation with their children, in helping the school board develop good budgeting procedures, in seeking special gifts from prominent persons on behalf of the school; and he may not be. In developing the pastor's "job description" for the school ministry, it is important that both pastor and principal break out of preconceived molds or notions about the "role of the pastor." There are fifty ways in which the pastor can serve the school community, and some priests will be excellent in certain of these ways and others will be excellent in others ways: there simply is no one mold for all pastors, there is no one "job description" that fits every parish priest.

One area in which nearly all parish priests are called to serve the school community is that of leading the celebration of the liturgy. Even in this area, however, the recently published Roman document on "Liturgies for Children" admits that not all priests can preach to small children; and, when this is the case, the document allows for non-ordained persons to proclaim the Word and preach in the assembly.

If both pastor and principal can listen carefully and patiently to one another, a pastoral "job description" in the area of school ministry can be developed for this particular school situation and with this particular priest in mind. Then the jobs of pastor and principal will be much easier.

The Principal's Role

The principal is the immediate leader of the ministry of the school. Pastors should not assume this role: very few of us have the educational background or the experience to do this ministry in any case and, even those of us who do, have as pastors another ministry to carry out. If we are pastoring the parish well, we do not have time to hire teachers, review textbooks, decide on programs, and generally oversee the development of the life of the school. All of this is the work of the principal.

The principal is responsible for working with the school board in the continued development of good school policy. Part of this ministry involves in-service work with the board itself: our boards are composed of parent volunteers and, as they enter into this important work, they need to have opportunities for learning the function of a board and its members. Working with the diocesan office and its resources, the principal should see that these opportunities are regularly provided.

Good policy is not problem solving, although problems can be the occasion for reflection and discussion which lead to good policy. The principal is the problem-solving leader in the school community, and boards which undertake this function confuse roles and make educational leadership very difficult for the principal.

Good policies give guidelines for the principal and the school community and are very helpful when they are known: school policies should be published and put in the hands of every parent. They are of almost no value when they are known to board members alone.

While policies can be developed for every area of school life, it is important to understand that these are guides rather than detailed plans. For example, a board can have a policy that "every area of academic life will be evaluated at least once every five years;" but it

would be bad policy to say, "Dr. Jones of State University will conduct a general evaluation of the principal and the school every other year and will tell the principal and staff the changes that are to be made."

A very important function of the principal is to become a good assessor of teachers and to hire a faculty of persons who are dedicated to the mission of the school and who have the competence, both as persons of faith and as professionals, to carry out that mission. Neither the board nor the pastor should hire teachers: they should be involved in the process of hiring the principal to whom they entrust the educational leadership of the school, and then the principal should hire the teachers.

The principal and the pastor can, however, agree on the pastor's role in the selection and hiring of teachers and, with such an agreement, the pastor can assist the principal in this very important aspect of school ministry. The role of the pastor in this arrangement would be an additional assurance to the community that the teacher to be hired will be a person dedicated to the mission of the school. This might be an especially happy arrangement with a new principal or one of little experience since it would present to the community a picture of a pastor actively supporting his principal and acting with her or him in the hiring process. While the pastor can serve the principal and the ministry of the school in this way, such work does depend on mutual agreement: as with any collaboration within a parish staff, if forced or pressured, it is likely to become an unhappy interdependence.

Beyond the responsibility of hiring the staff, the principal has the ongoing ministry of assessing the staff needs and providing for that continuing education. Here, again, listening is a key quality: the principal who imposes staff in-service programs without listening carefully to the faculty expressing its needs for growth is liable to provide fine teaching but little learning. Adult education of any kind must be based upon perceived needs if it is to succeed. And, here again, the board can very well have policy regarding the continuing education of the school staff; but this policy, if it is good policy, leaves room for the staff, under the leadership of the principal, to shape its specific dimensions for a given year.

The diocesan community is also important in this area of leadership: often, diocesan resources will be available to serve the educational needs of the school staff, and the principal can be the key connecting person between these programs and the educators of our children.

As the educational leader of the school, the principal is also responsible for curriculum development. With the cooperation of the faculty, and sometimes with the assistance of outside evaluators, the principal in a continuous fashion reflects on the full curriculum: student learning needs, teaching methods, learning resources and texts, and the hierarchy of needs within the school. Together, the principal and faculty plan the year-by-year development and improvement of each curricular area so that the school can continue to grow as a place of education.

Neither pastor nor board should decide on textbooks and materials: the principal is the educational leader of the school. Even in the area of religion, the pastor should stay his hand: every diocese has a list of accepted religion texts and, within this context, the competence of the faculty and principal should be respected.

Another function of the principal reaches to the publics we serve: the principal, rather than the pastor, should be most prominent in reporting to the rest of the staff, the parents and the general parish community on the progress, the goals and the direction of the school. The principal, not the pastor, should be the visible leader of this ministry within the total parish, and the pastor should support the principal as this leader. This is true, moreover, in every area of parish ministry: the pastor should point out, support and tell the community about the leaders of religious education, adult education, youth ministry, liturgy, social action and any other area in which staff is working. Others too easily give the pastor credit for all that takes place in the parish, and we pastors too easily accept this credit. We would do better to promote the good work and leadership of others on the staff who are not as visible as we are.

Finally, the principal and not the pastor should provide for the financial development necessary to sustain the school ministry. Often this will be done through the school board or through a "development board" which many parishes and schools are beginning to discover. In my view, neither pastor nor principal should spend large amounts of time on finances; but both of them, in their respective areas, have to see that this work is carried out. The school board, with the principal, can develop realistic tuition policies to sustain this ministry and other groups of parents, who value the school highly, will cooperate in fund-raising activities. In the very near future, we will see in parishes "directors of development:" they will have the responsibility of helping both school and parish by seeking major gifts and conducting seminars on wills which will explain to interested persons how they might make substantial contributions to the ministry of their choice.

Trust, the Basic Attitude

Trust is not only the center of personal relationships; it is also at the center of professional relationships, whether in ministry or in other kinds of work. It is dysfunctional to be part of a community of ministry with men and women of the Gospel whom we do not trust: it makes no sense.

Trust in this setting does not mean that persons who work together have to be the best of friends. Frequently, one finds confusion on this point. Parish teams are not personal support groups: each person in ministry has to find his or her personal support person, group or system. But trust does call for professional support: those who work together on a parish team know that they can count on one another for insight, reflection on ministry, and other forms of professional support. They know that they do not have to worry about others on the team speaking badly about them behind their backs whether in the parish community or out of it. They know that everyone else on the staff wants to see them grow as ministers of the Good News.

We are all human and we are all subject to sin: it may happen, on occasion, that a pastor speaks ill of the principal, or worse, that he speaks badly about this minister to others in the local community of faith. This can happen, but it should be seen for what it is: an evil, a destroyer of the professional trust that is essential to parish ministry, a wrong to be avoided. It is no joke, even if people are laughing at its telling, when parish staff members run one another down. Such conduct would be unthinkable among doctors or lawyers working together in a clinic or a professional practice, even if the Gospel is not one of their basic books.

Quite to the contrary, while they challenge one another to greater growth and depth through their staff meetings, staff days, retreat experiences and in-service education, the parish staff should be a model of mutual respect and support as together they proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the local community. This is elementary to Gospel ministry and I am sure it needs no further elucidation.

Hiring the Principal

A key element in the pastor-principal relationship is a good hiring process. I do not think this process is difficult to develop. In doing so, one should keep in mind that the school board and the parish staff will both have to work with the principal as together they develop parish and school policy, practice and programming. A good hiring practice

will include both the school board and the parish staff and a process through which consensus can be reached between these groups.

Essentially, this process has three steps:

1) the school board interviews candidates for a principal's position and then recommends to the staff of the parish three persons, all of whom are acceptable to the board;
2) the parish staff, including the pastor, together interviews these candidates presented by the school board;
3) the staff decides on the one person who will be the next principal of the school.

To be sure, this suggested three-step process has details that need attention: the board may want to have the present principal and two of its members act as a screening committee for candidates; board members will profit from some discussion with others who have had experience in interviewing before they actually meet the candidates; times for the individual interviews will have to be determined; explicit prayer will be a part of the group's agenda as they enter into this important decision-making process. Other details of the experience will come to mind.

But attention to the details should not blur the essential focus or insight of this work: a good hiring process, in which the pastor does not act alone, will prove very helpful both to him and to the larger community of faith.

Renewing or Terminating the Principal's Contract

If good hiring procedures are used, a process leading to the termination of a principal's contract will be almost needless. However, because there have been some instances of persons being dismissed unfairly, justice requires that the community have such a process.

We come out of a tradition in which our principals were assigned and changed in their assignments by religious superiors who notified the particular pastors of these decisions. More commonly today, a principal, once hired, continues until he or she decides to move to another position.

In the absence of specific and serious difficulties, contract renewal should be presumed. Time limits, however, are useful: board policy, for example, could state that the principal will inform the board no later than February first of his or her intention to renew the contract for another year, and the board policy could also say that the principal's renewed contract will be offered no later than February fifteenth.

While the question of terminating the contract of a principal will arise only rarely, the board should have a written policy for this situation which takes into consideration the following steps.

Finding a given principal's ministry unsatisfactory, the board should share the specifics of this dissatisfaction with the principal and the pastor in executive session. A measurable set of steps for improvement should be agreed upon and time for improvement allowed. If the board sees no improvement after this time has elapsed and still is inclined to withhold a contract, the principal should be so informed.

At this point, if the principal wants to continue in this school and believes the board is in error, the pastor's judgment should be elicited. The latter will review the situation individually with each and then together with both parties; he will then give his judgment. If this decision is deemed incorrect by either the board or the principal, either party is free to appeal to the parish council.

The council, again acting in executive session, is the last board of arbitration on the local level, and its decision ought to be binding on the school board. If the principal, however, does not agree or accept this decision, she or he ought to be free to move to the diocesan level and make use of its processes of mediation and arbitration. All parties should agree to accept the diocesan decision as final.

It is good for a parish community to work on this kind of policy during a time when there is no evidence that it will be needed or used. Once the policy is accepted in the parish community, it should be written into the contract material given to each staff member or, in some other way, be made known clearly to each one. It may never need to be used in a given parish or school, but it is good policy to have: one does not want to try to write rules of mediation and arbitration at the time this process is being started with a given staff member.

The hiring policy, however, is more important, and the discussion of this kind of policy should not cause us to lose sight of the basic point, the central insight of this reflection: if a good process for hiring is employed, it is most unlikely that one will have to enter into any of these steps of mediation or arbitration.

On the other hand, if I, as a pastor, insist on hiring my principal alone and without staff and board consultation, I am opening myself to a number of unnecessary problems. This is not good pastoral practice: if I fail to listen to the voice of the Spirit speaking through others at this important moment of decision making in the parish, I can expect to pay for my reluctance later, and pay to the detriment of myself, my principal, and the entire community of faith.

Msgr. Raymond J. Boland with board members, John Kiernan and Tom Byrd.

3

The Pastor and the School Board

We have already discussed a number of points which relate to the school board and its ministry: it is impossible to speak about the ministry of the principal without doing so. Here I would like to share my reflections on three questions and, in doing so, give you my ideas about the role of the pastor vis-a-vis the school board. These three questions are: 1) must the pastor be an ex-officio member of the board? 2) must the pastor be present for all board meetings? 3) should the pastor fear the errors the school board may make?

Must the Pastor be a Member of the School Board?

While many educators seem to require that the pastor be an ex-officio member of the school board, I do not share this respected opinion. While recognizing that mine is a minority view, I nevertheless see it as consistent with good principles of shared ministry.

Looking at the parish structure, I see each ministry having its board of ministry, and each board having one staff person as the professional person working with it. A parish with a religious education program, for example, could have a religious education board, and the parish director of religious education would be the staff person working with this board.

For the school, obviously, the principal is the parish staff person who works with the board. The principal is, if you will, the "pastor" of that area of ministry.

The pastor is a member of the staff and is the leader of the staff. Members of the board are not, in my view, staff persons, and staff persons should not be members of the board. The board should be chosen from among the parishioners who have a special interest in a given area of ministry, whether that be the ministry of the school, the liturgy, adult education or social justice. Staff members should not serve as board members, but each board should have one staff person working with it as its consultant and executive.

In the case of the school board, it is clear that the principal is the staff person who is the consultant and executive person. It is inappropriate, in my view, for the pastor to be either the staff person working with the school board or, because he is himself a staff person, a member of the board.

Must the Pastor be Present for Board Meetings?

In initiating board work and ministry, the pastor's presence will be helpful if it is not overbearing. His useful presence may continue for some time: he may be able to pray with this community, encourage them, study with them the role of a board, thank them for their acceptance of this ministry.

Eventually, though, board work should become their ministry and not his: his presence, useful in the beginning, should gradually diminish.

The absence of the pastor can be a freeing presence to the board: it tells them that they are trusted, they are entrusted with a very important ministry in the community, they are mature Christian persons called to leadership in the local church. His absence can free them from the childish notion that many adults retain which prevents them from approving anything until father says it is all right. His absence can enable these persons to assume ministry and the responsibility for ministry.

To those who would say that the pastor's absence is a sign that he does not care about the school, I would argue that such a statement is manipulative, divisive and unworthy of Christian insight. If a pastor is going to attend board meetings, it surely ought not be on the basis of his absence being judged in such shallow terms. In any case, the absence we are discussing here is quite different in its meaning.

As I experience the ministry of a parish priest, twelve-hour days are normal ones and board meetings are the exception rather than the rule. I simply do not see attending all board meetings as the direction in which the Spirit is calling me to minister in the community. If anyone

does see it as a Spirit-inspired direction, by all means he should follow that inspiration.

Nor do I mean that a pastor should never attend a board meeting. He should have a strong relationship with his board: he should thank them, encourage them, talk with the chair whenever he or she wishes, come to meetings upon request for specific purposes, and he should celebrate the ministry of the board members in prayer and liturgy from time to time.

My experience has taught me that this kind of relationship with a school board works very well: the school board knows that, with the principal, it sets the budget, establishes policy, charts the future direction of the school and, overall, is an essential leadership community within the total experience of the parish.

My experience, again, has shown me the truly outstanding results of a strong school board working in concert with an outstanding principal: school enrollment is rising in a community where numbers of students are declining; a substantial financial reserve has been established for the school ministry; a school policy manual has been developed; multi-year teacher salary schedules, with a variety of tracks, are now a reality. These are just a sample of the effectiveness of the school board's work, but my point is made: none of these things would have been created by me as the school policy maker. The community is filled with the gifts of the Spirit and, as pastors, we exercise our ministry best and support the school most effectively by calling forth these gifts for the good of the ministry, for the good of the school. We are not called to do the ministry alone nor can we do it; but we can allow and encourage others to share in this Spirit-work, and then great problems can be solved and real progress can be made.

Trust Despite Mistakes

What about the errors the board will make? Some pastors have told me that they fear boards not only because they feel the pastor must go to all the meetings but also, and most of all, because they fear that the boards will make mistakes. I would agree that boards can make mistakes: in general, any other serious Christian in the community can make mistakes neither much better nor much worse than I, and none of us is infallible. But I do not agree that we should fear this reality. No one can be anything but paralyzed in parish ministry if he is going to be afraid of mistakes.

Making mistakes is a marvelous learning process and we should not deprive our boards of this experience: much of my growth in life has been via my mistakes and I plan to continue my growth. Why deprive a board of that privilege?

In so far as "the board will make mistakes" argument intends to suggest that the pastor will not make mistakes, it is misguided. It is simply not true. In fact, it is far more likely that a number of people concentrating on a given issue will come up with a good decision than that one person will, especially when his attention is drawn in many different directions.

The answer to "What does father think we should do?" is not the ultimate criterion for discerning the Spirit's voice in the local community and, as an ultimate criterion, it is theologically indefensible: we pastors ought to stop worrying about our veto power. This does not mean that our voice is not important, but it does imply that there ought to be a consensus among parish board members and parish staff members before significant new steps are taken in the life of the community.

Trust is important. Boards of all kinds do need continuing inservice education to do their ministry well, as we have already said. That should be a part of the job description of any board or board member. But a pastor who goes through all the work of developing a board structure and then feels he has to worry about all the mistakes that might be made is simply setting his own trap. Again, trust is an essential element of shared ministry; ultimately, my life and this parish community is in the hands of the Spirit. Since lay persons, through baptism, are called to ministry, we can be sure that the Spirit will be present to them in their dedication and love, and will speak and work through them very well.

Rev. Msgr. James F. Montgomery with parent group.

4

Relating to Parental Groups

Another concern of pastors is the quality of their relationship to parental groups, sometimes called home and school, parent-teacher, alumni or parent support associations. These groups are auxiliary groups wanting to learn about the direction of the school and hoping to support the school in its ministry.

Two words summarize the pastor's role in regard to this kind of association: support and referral.

Support

When the pastor speaks to these groups of parents, he should be a spokesman of the Gospel: he should express his thankfulness for their sacrifice and dedication; he should encourage them to continue to support this ministry; he should call them to work cooperatively with teachers for the good of the students. When he can be present for their meetings, he will be able to meet a number of the parishioners in an informal way and come to know them a bit better. Needless to say, he will be always supportive in his words about the principal and the school staff and board.

Referral

Although these are not policy-making groups, suggestions for school policy often can emerge in their discussions. These suggestions should be referred to the school board for its deliberation.

Anxieties of one kind or another will occasionally emerge in these meetings and, again, the pastor should not see these matters as his immediate concern. Parental groups may choose to make their complaints directly to the pastor, thus bypassing the board and the principal. The pastor should not be taken in by the flattery that these requests for his intervention will often carry with them, and he should be careful not to be the person who intervenes in the first instance. The principal is the school administrator, and difficulties should be referred directly to her or him. Board members often find that they have to learn the same lesson: board members are wrong when they say to a parent, "Don't worry about that; I will see that it is settled." So the pastor who allows either individual parents or parental groups to bypass the principal and come directly to him makes it appear that he, rather than the principal, is the real administrator of the school. He takes on work which is not his and, in the process, makes the principal's work doubly difficult.

In mediating problem situations, the pastor should be a second line of support for the principal: when the latter wants to involve him in a given situation, he or she is free to do so. If their combined insight cannot bring a solution, the chair of the board may become involved. If a solution still escapes the community, this may be a sign that a policy decision is required and the full board is to be consulted.

The point here, however, is not to outline steps in mediation involving complaints from parental groups. Rather, it is to say that the role of the pastor vis-a-vis these groups is to support their constructive work while refraining from immediate and direct intervention in the problems they raise. He is to point them toward the person who is the school administrator, the principal; this is one way he can teach through action that, in terms of the school, the principal is the pastor of that area of parish ministry.

Rev. Msgr. Ralph J. Kuebner with parish staff members.

5

Relating the School to the Total Parish

The most difficult relational question of pastors regards the relationship of the school to the total parish community: often, this relationship is the most difficult one to achieve. While we sometimes see school parents who appear to care nothing at all for the ministry of the parish as a whole, and while we sometimes see parish leaders who have a very negative view of the school as the one ministry that gets all the time, attention and funding, the key to the solution of this problem is, in my view, the parish staff.

The Parish Staff

Among the several ingredients necessary to develop a total parish sense among parishioners and school parents, the most important is the parish staff—and the most important persons involved are the principal and the religious education director. If these two persons speak well of each other and of each other's ministry, parishioners will, for the most part, follow suit. If these two persons do not speak well of each other, the pastor has a staff problem which he must address without delay. What does one do with a principal who does not believe in the value of a religious education program or a parish-wide sacramental preparation program? One does not hire such a person as principal. This should be one of the issues directly addressed when the staff interviews a prospective principal.

If one finds a principal with such an attitude upon coming as a new pastor to a parish, this issue should be faced immediately and directly: it is very difficult to change one's own attitudes and perhaps impossible to change another's; but behavior can change, especially if one sees the importance of making this change.

I work with a principal who has been a sponsor for one of our catechumens; has encouraged teachers in the school to volunteer in the religious education program; works with the religious education director in developing the parish program for the sacraments of initiation; is an extraordinary minister of the Eucharist on Sunday. I remember a parish that was badly divided between school and non-school parents; now, it is little more than a bad memory. I have a principal to thank for that change.

The staff is central to the problem of relating the school to the total parish community. If the principal, by her/his actions, says to others that the total ministry of the parish is important; if he/she says that the Gospel of Jesus Christ coming to take root in our hearts is what is central to parish and school together, then we have the problem solved for the most part.

Equal Treatment

The pastor is also important in this development: he, too, can lead a community to split its allegiance one way or the other. He, too, can encourage all forms of ministry in the local church, can call leadership forth from parents with children in the school and from parents without children in the school, can respond to requests from those in charge of the school ministry as well as to requests from those in other ministries. He, too, by his conduct, can be a bridge builder relating school and total parish ministry.

Young people should be treated on an equal basis: servers should not be chosen exclusively from the school, and sacramental preparation programs should be parish rather than school or religious education programs. All parents, whatever the school of their children, should be guiding their young as they prepare for sacraments and should be with them in the Sunday liturgies of the parish which celebrates these events. Ministries of all kinds should be open to men and women without consideration for the school to which they send their children: lectors, distributors of communion, hospital visitors, greeters, festival workers, officers of parish councils and committees. Contrary practices are self-destructive of the local community of faith.

One-Issue Parishioners

With the best efforts of the staff, we will inevitably meet one-issue persons in the parish community. Nor are these persons limited to the scope of parish life: the church abounds with persons today who see one issue as the key to life, salvation, everything. These persons will tell anyone who will listen that their issue is all-important and that everyone of merit is involved in their struggle. Their issue might be the Catholic school, charismatic renewal, prison reform, abortion, the nuclear arms race or unemployment. We live in a world of many critical issues and each of us is free to posit one or the other as the center about which all revolves.

The reality of parish life—and here it is a microcosm of the world—is that there are many ministries of deep importance: the local community of faith must call forth the gifts of everyone and encourage each to use these gifts as well in one or another of these ministries. We need persons concerned with our schools but we need persons concerned with the divorced as well; we need those who will walk with our catechumens and we need others who will journey with our adolescents. We need so many gifts in the local parish community today that all should be welcomed: the pastor should make it known that all parishioners should welcome everyone else, whatever interest of the Gospel of Jesus Christ draws them at this point in their life.

If individuals can afford to be one-issue persons at some point in their lives, the same is not true of the parish community as a whole: we need to promote a variety of gifts of the Spirit to meet a variety of needs. With a little help, most of us disciples of Jesus Christ can come to see that our "one issue" is not the total story of salvation as it is being recounted today; with a little help, most of us can see that we need each other, we need one another's gifts given in a variety of ways and for a variety of programs and goals if we are to be a living community of faith.

The School Gets All the Money

When we hear negative comments about the ministry of the school, they are often raised in terms of finances, and people tend to say that the school gets all the money of the parish.

If this is the case, of course, the school funding should be changed. Some schools, such as many inner-city schools, are special missions of the church and well worth the effort even though they require outside financing, diocesan help. Generally, schools will have to become more

self-financed and schools which actually do take a majority of the Sunday offering for their support will not long survive.

In my experience, the statement that "the school gets all the money" is simply inaccurate: it is a perception that some one or some group has of the reality. With financial disclosure, these inaccurate views are put to rest, at least for the most part, and this obstacle to integrating the school within the total parish ministry is removed.

Within this total context of effort, it is not too difficult to relate the school to the entire ministry of the parish. More and more, people are coming to see that continuing the life and ministry of Jesus Christ among us is not the exclusive function of any one parish program, work or ministry. So the school can come to be seen, at least by most, whether they have children in school or not, as one valuable component of a total parish ministry that is interested in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ through all its complex of ministries.

Rev. Carl F. Dianda with school children.

6

Worship With Children

Celebrating our faith in the context of the school life is one of the tasks of the pastor. Many of us come from a past in which the quantity of worship was the main measure of the community's level of faith: children attended daily Mass, went to weekly confession, and prayed over and over again every day.

In that experience, the school was also the setting for the first reception of the sacraments: students were prepared for confession by their second grade teacher and they celebrated their First Communion together as a class. Children of the parish who were not in the school often had a different time for their First Communion experience. The school children were also prepared by their teacher for Confirmation but, since the bishop was only coming once, all the children of the parish, along with some adults, did get confirmed together.

Our forms of prayer were quite standard in that context: Mass was either low or high, recited or sung; Confession required a standard set of prayers and responses which we all memorized; all learned the answers to questions on Confirmation and were prepared—their teacher hoped—to answer the bishop's questions; and all of us had a standard set of prayers, beginning with the Our Father and ending with the Acts of Faith, Hope, Charity and Contrition, which we learned from our early years. Even if we did not understand everything at the time, we memorized our prayers and the answers of our catechism, and teachers were confident that all of this would serve us well as we grew into

adulthood when we would more fully understand everything we had learned.

Over the past fifteen years, our community of faith has reflected on these practices of our youth. This reflection is part of a deeper history: it is not difficult to go back to 1880 and trace a hundred years of reflection on the religious education of our youth. Over these years, it is interesting to notice how the interest of the community has shifted from method to content and then shifted back and forth again. Our reflections on the religious education of children did not begin with the Second Vatican Council nor will the community ever stop questioning itself about this important aspect of its mission.

This section is focused around three aspects of worship with children that I hear being discussed very much today: 1) the quality of our worship, 2) the ways of worship with children, and 3) the celebration of the sacraments with the young.

Quality Rather Than Quantity

Although one may occasionally hear our schools praised as Catholic because of the number of Masses the students attend, liturgists and religious leaders today are asking us to reflect more seriously on the quality of our prayer and worship. Over the past decade, our leaders have given us a set of three Eucharistic Prayers for liturgies with children and have even published a special instruction on celebrating liturgy with the young. Both of these important documents tell us that children are not adults and that the quality of our worship with children is very important.

These documents, as well as the explicit statements of many of our national and diocesan liturgical leaders, tell us that liturgies with the young should be well prepared, that they should be participatory, and that students should have the opportunity to share in the shaping of these experiences of faith life.

Normally, lay faculty members and religious as well will profit from in-service programs which will help them guide their students in preparing these liturgies. This knowledge is not, after all, innate. Depending on the quality of his own liturgical formation, the parish priest himself may undertake this work as part of his ministry to the school community. Or he may prefer to provide a workshop in which someone from the diocesan office of liturgy will come and help the teachers with this important aspect of their Catholic school professional experience.

Inviting children to assist in preparing a special liturgy for themselves and their classmates may cause a certain tension. Colorful balloons may speak differently to a child of nine and a pastor of fifty, and the latter may be tempted to simply ban the balloon. Inviting the ideas of others always is a call to listen and to discuss. Sometimes, when we come to see the idea behind the symbol, we see the value of it. Other times, we may be convinced that such a symbol will deform rather than inform the children's worship experience. As persons called to be leaders of worship, we should share this reflection with the children and their teachers as well.

This sort of approach to worship takes time and it will change our way of worship with the students of the school. Many of us, for example, think that we must have an opening day liturgy for the entire school community: we have always had it and we must continue to have it. We are expected to have it. But how can teachers and students prepare a liturgy when they are just meeting each other again? Might it not be better to draw the community together at the end of the first week of school? Could we not go to the older students in the school and their teachers and say, "As the leaders of the school community this year, could you prepare an opening-of-school liturgy that will allow us all together to pray to the Lord for a school year that will help each person in our community to grow and learn and become a better person?"

The same logic will hold during the school year: our rhythm of liturgical practice will have to change if we are to be concerned with quality. Daily liturgy for a group of persons who are at a stage of religious experience where this event is a deep moment of meditative union with the Lord is one thing; daily or near-daily liturgy for elementary school children is something quite different. As a practice, the latter is based on a theology which says that "more is better," and we as a school or parish community could hardly have a more superficial base for our experience of worship.

Ways of Worship

Today, we have a variety of possibilities in publicly celebrating our faith with children. While we will often be called to share in the Eucharist, we have the opportunity of other kinds of services as well. These are usually called para-liturgies, and they can be prayer services developed around themes that the students are exploring in their growing religious education and experience.

These para-liturgical events often follow the logic of the Eucharist: there is gathering in song and introduction, opening prayer, listening to the Word, reflection on the Word, response to the Word in prayer and song, final blessing and dismissal. These prayer services can be celebrated in the classroom, out of doors, or in church—depending on the theme and the people involved in the prayer.

While many of us tend to be strongly word oriented, we should not overlook the use of symbols. Water, light, oil, and food—just as they are used in our sacramental liturgies—can find place and expression for deeper meaning in these kinds of prayer and worship.

Music, drama, dance and story all can have a part in this prayer and can help students express themes of love, healing, life in the Lord, reconciliation, proclaiming the Word to others, self-sacrifice, dedication, sorrow and praise.

Is it wise to limit ourselves to the Eucharist as the only way of gathering the young for prayer? Would it not be possible and even preferable, in a well-prepared, year-long program of prayer and worship experiences for children, to include the Eucharist along with a variety of other non-Eucharistic prayer experiences?

Whether Eucharistic or other, students who have not yet reached the junior high years often enjoy a dialogue homily in which the celebrant or homilist explores the meaning of the Gospel with them. Young children most of all enjoy this way of meditating on the Good News. They will contribute eagerly to the discussion and, if their comments sometimes seem to stray from the central point, often enough these digressions themselves enable the celebrant to lead them gently to a deeper appreciation of some part of our Lord's message of life.

Again, young children enjoy expressing themselves as they answer the call to prayer. Songs that are expressed in various hand gestures hold their attention and help them become more fully involved in their prayer. Unlike many of their elders, the young appreciate well done liturgical dance and one can sense their attentiveness as a prayerful dancer leads them through the Our Father.

Older students often seem more dominated by self-consciousness: while these students can profit deeply from a prayerful celebration and a well prepared Gospel reflection, dialogue homilies do not fit easily into this setting. Moreover, with voices changing and classmates watching, they are more reluctant to express themselves freely in song and gesture.

The need for participation as well as the differences between older and younger students suggests that all-school Masses should be the exception rather than the rule. Variety will enrich a well-planned annual school program of prayer and worship.

Celebrating the Sacraments

How should we introduce students to the sacraments? How should we celebrate their coming to the Eucharist, to Reconciliation, to Confirmation?

Many parishes, influenced by their reflection on the Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults, are asking parents to sponsor their children as they approach these sacred mysteries. Parents are invited to come with their children to parish preparation programs, regardless of the school their children attend. These significant moments are being seen as steps of initiation into the community of faith, and the parish rather than the school is experienced as the appropriate locus for this religious activity.

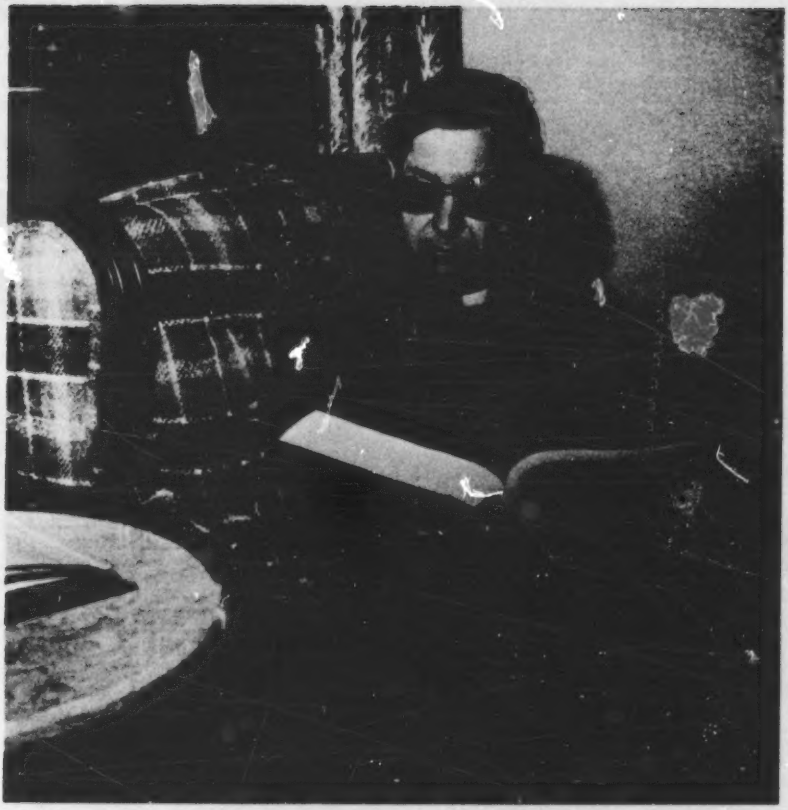
This does not mean that the school is not interested in the sacramental life of the children. Rather, through offering a total religious program with well planned scope and sequence, the school community is an on-going support for parents who are leading their children to a deeper appreciation and living of their faith. However, in this approach, the school is not replacing the parents in leading the children to the sacraments nor is it replacing the parish community as the students' local community of faith.

The RCIA calls for individual sponsors for those seeking to be initiated into the faith community. These sponsors come to discussions with their catechumens, they share stories of faith life with them, they take time for a cup of coffee or a meal with them: they are with them all the way through their process of entrance into the church.

Parishes are asking parents to do the same with their children during their initiatory experiences. Parents are their natural sponsors, the ones who ought to stand with them as they prepare and as they experience their first reception of the sacraments.

The parish rather than the school is the local community of faith in which these sacramental experiences should be centered. Parents rather than teachers should be the significant adults standing with their children and sponsoring them before the community and its bishop. We who are teachers serve a more humble role as those who assist parents in this ministry.

My own pastoral experience has taught me that we have a long way to go as we initiate our children, as we help them with their first steps in what we hope will be a growing and maturing life of faith. I think that we, as a community of faith, will reflect much more over the next decade on this experience, and I think we will make some significant changes. But that is nothing new: as a church, we have a long history of reflecting on initiation, on confirmation, on reconciliation, and on the total religious education of our young people. As teachers, members of the Catholic school community will be leaders in this reflection along with pastors, liturgists and catechists.



Rev. Robert M. Kearns, SSJ.

7

Research and Development

I wish I could lead you through the past twenty years of research on Catholic schools and religious education. To do this, I would have to take a sabbatical and research the research. While this would be interesting, it is not now possible.

Instead, these lines are my personal, pastoral reflection on the research ideas which have stuck with me and which have formed my vision of Catholic schools and religious education over the past twenty years.

Schools Are a Good Ministry

Regarding Catholic schools, the National Opinion Research Center is the source of my reflection: NORC has clearly led the way in this field. This research has taught me, essentially and as a central point, that Catholic schools are worth the effort: this ministry does make a difference in the lives of students, especially if the student continues through two or more levels of Catholic school life.

Schools Are Wanted

The research tells us that parents and others in the community want the schools and are willing to support them. While attitudes of Catholics have changed significantly on many points of church life over the past quarter century, the commitment to the Catholic school is one place where this attitude has not changed: it was highly favored then and it is now.

Schools Are Not Available

The principle reason why many parents do not send their children to Catholic schools, this research tells us, is that there are no Catholic schools nearby. The research indicates that the building of schools has not followed the movement of Catholics. There seems to be a challenge implicit in this finding, and a few dioceses and parishes are beginning to take up this challenge.

More Important in Change

Research further tells us that Catholic schools are more important to the community during times of intensive change; that they help students in their commitment to the church through these times of change. This suggests to me that they will be more important in the future even than they are now. This is personal opinion rather than research; but I am convinced that the schools will be more highly valued in the mid 1990's than they are now and that we should and will begin to build new ones over the next decade.

They Will Be Lay Schools

The research indicates overwhelmingly that the parental community accepts lay educators and that our schools will not close because we have made or will have to make a shift from religious to lay teachers. While the entire system owes its origin and the first hundred and fifty years of its life to religious women, it is proving to be a gift of enduring value. Surely, the elementary school is one of the great gifts given to American Catholics.

Religious Education Trends

In regard to religious education trends, the research does tell us that Catholics, by and large, are happy with the changes in religious education programs and do not want to return to the catechism classes of thirty years ago.

One of the recent trends in religious education involves evaluation of the content of these programs: recently, NCEA has developed and made available to educators instruments which can help us determine what Catholic doctrine is being learned in our schools and programs. Religious growth indeed involves much more than learning, and these tests which measure both knowledge and attitudes should prove helpful to educators and students alike as programs are modified to improve the total learning experience.

The research tells us that programs of education in human sexuality are overwhelmingly approved by parents and adults, regardless of the opinion to the contrary that one often hears. Father John Forliti's program, using video tapes and requiring parents to preview lessons which their children will subsequently view, is one of the best expressions of this development within Catholic circles.

Christiane Brusselmans is perhaps the leading religious educator in the Western world. I hear her urging parish communities to learn lessons from the catechumenate experience as they develop religious education for the young: the young should have sponsors, others older in the community should walk with them through their initiation experiences, families should be together in these experiences, and we should reexamine our dividing children one from another by the sacraments for which they are preparing.

The catechumenate itself is, in my experience, the major change in religious education of the past decade. And it is a marvelous change. I have the privilege of working in one parish program, directed by a layman who is a professional catechist, and it is far superior to any other non-school religious education program that I have ever shared. One trend, clearly, will involve a deeper analysis of the catechumenate to see how its principles apply to the religious education of persons of all ages in the parish community.

A part of the catechumenate experience involves story telling. John Shea has written and spoken widely on the importance of story telling and the importance of sharing our own story as we reflect on the Gospel story and reach out to touch the lives of persons in our communities. Further reflection on story telling as a vehicle of religious formation is clearly a trend today.

And so is parental participation; it is a reality now in most sacramental preparation programs and this trend will continue as we come to understand better how persons grow within the community of faith.

Overall, religious educational writers and publishers have served us well over the past twenty years, and they will continue to serve our parish ministry with distinction. Teaching aids of many kinds are available and continue to be revised and we will not lack for excellent teaching resources.

Rev. Joseph E. Norton with Tuition Board Member Mr. Silas Vaughn and Principal Sr. Alice Kelly, OSB.

8

Financing the Schools

If it be true that finances should not dictate ministry, it is also true that the rising cost of Catholic schools is a serious pastoral problem. It is on the minds of pastors, and we need to seek solutions.

While financing is usually put at the head of any list of concerns, in this reflection it has been placed at the end of the line. I believe that finances must follow our other concerns and not precede them.

In my view, this is a serious question and not a frivolous one. We tend to think, for example, that we cannot build schools because we don't have the money. We do not reflect seriously enough about the possibility that we may not have the money because we will not build the schools.

The above is only an example. On a wider basis, we often think that we cannot provide aspects of parish ministry because we do not have the money. Again, we seldom reflect that we may not have the money because we are not providing needed parish ministry.

To state this more abstractly, the question is this: does mission follow money or does money follow mission? Surely, the mission must be announced if money is to follow it; no one can support something if he or she is unaware of it.

With this idea in mind, I would like to reflect on the following ideas about financing our schools in the future: 1) planning and communication will be important elements of this work; 2) school development directors will appear; 3) parish development directors will become common; 4) sacrificial giving will become a common parish program.

Planning and Communication

One key to the future financing of our schools, and parishes as well, will be planning and communication. This means that we will plan our future school with members of our community, and then we will tell our people about it in writing. The community will want this school and will support it.

Our Catholic schools of the future will be different. I envision an environment in which the artistic talents are stressed and the competitive spirit loses ground. Faculties will be ninety-five percent lay and we will no longer have a dual salary system, one for laity and another for religious. New buildings will be built and old ones will be renovated. Some schools will be largely self-financed and financial directors will be common. Every board will be working not only on policy and finance, but also on planning the school's future.

And these schools will continue in the roots of their tradition: parents will continue to want young persons to learn and grow within a community of faith. We will continue to look for a faculty of persons who are serious about Jesus Christ, and we will maintain a framework of classes and activities which allows students to reflect on the meaning of Jesus Christ and his Gospel. Our schools will provide a disciplined atmosphere in an environment emphasizing self-growth and the learning of basic skills. And these schools will be in high demand.

Most significantly, these Catholic school communities of the 1990's will have a vision. They will take planning seriously. They will continually look at their future goals and objectives, and they will make these known to their supporting communities. They will be schools with articulated futures—thought out, planned and communicated. By 1990, this will be common to all Catholic schools on all levels of education: it will be an accepted axiom that only Catholic schools with a future will have a future.

School Development Directors

A major change will take place in the administration of these schools: there will be an associate principal who is the director of planning and development. Some schools will still be supported by the parish community, to some extent, and in these cases the director of development will probably be on the parish staff. But some schools will be financially self-supporting, and the director of planning and development will be an integral part of the school community. The mission of this person will be to assist the board, staff and student body in developing,

monitoring and communicating the school's future vision, and to solicit the community's support for this future.

The director of planning and development will work closely with the school board which will have a specific planning committee as a standing committee of the board. The annual school publication will have a section on its future, and this will be an important part of the publication: it will state what the school plans to do to improve, to develop, to become better than it is in terms of program, staff, and building.

This director will communicate the needs and vision of the school to its supporting communities: parents, friends, alumni, parishioners. He or she will solicit major gifts, special gifts, and bequests; and this income will fund the future developments.

This self-supporting school will operate under two budgets, and the associate principal will be responsible for both of them. One—funded from tuition and some other sources of income—will be the annual budget for the operation of the school. The other budget will be for new programs, materials, buildings, equipment, and this will be funded through special gifts. The board, with the principal, will have to create policy for these new developments and will have to set priorities for their inclusion in the school ministry.

These development directors will, as they gain experience, create new vehicles for school support: it may be possible to fund chairs in elementary schools; the summer vacancy of our buildings is an invitation to develop creative uses that can benefit both the school and the community; elementary school alumni have not even been asked to think about their former school, no matter how much they might like to support or endow it; the vast majority of Catholics have never even been asked to think about the ministry of the school as they make out their wills.

Father John Flynn in Omaha has done a great deal to promote the concept of planning, communicating and seeking financial support for the schools. He is almost alone in advancing the concept of the director of planning and development for the elementary schools; he is an oasis in the middle of a desert. But he will not be for long. The key person to the financial development of our schools is the director of development and, over the next decade, one school board after another will begin to risk the creation of this position on the staff. Through this person's ministry, we will plan, we will communicate, and we will be supported generously.

As we look to the future financing of the schools, we must be sensitive to those in the community who will not be able to afford the tuition payments involved. As Catholic schools, we would lose our collective soul were we to leave the poor standing outside our school doors.

It is incumbent upon every Catholic school board to find a solution to this problem. Some have successfully developed programs of individualized tuition, enabling those who can afford to pay more of the cost of education to do so. Others have developed tuition assistance funds which allow the principal to assist families who need financial help in a confidential way which assures that the family's dignity is not harmed.

In some cases, an entire school will need support and diocesan funds will be required. This is a problem for the diocesan school board or its finance committee. Again, dioceses are growing in their experience of this kind of financial support, and they in turn are supported by increasing numbers of Catholics who see the value of this ministry.

This kind of assistance is a specific witness to the Gospel. Our Catholic schools in America have a long history of service to the poor, and I cannot even conceive of the possibility that our educational leadership will ever abandon that tradition.

The Parish Development Director

Not a few educators are concerned that the school development director will, in effect, separate the school from the parish community. These critics see the school becoming an independent entity, totally self-financed, and they see this as a dangerous step. They fear that this will not really work, and so the school will not be able to continue. They see the splitting away from the parish as a bad direction, one that is against our tradition, and one that will hurt rather than help most schools.

While this view may be a bit pessimistic, it is true that communities do vary one from another, and the concept of a school director of development would not be good for all. For some, this should be a parish position; this person then works for special gifts and bequests for all parish projects and programs, including the school.

In this setting, the parish has two budgets: it has an operating budget, which includes the school subsidy, and it has a developmental budget which is always presented as tentative: it states that the community will undertake this building or that program provided the special gifts are forthcoming to allow it.

As I see this picture come into focus, the development director has the task of generating the vision of the total parish community of the future. He or she does not do this as author, but as presenter: the parish council, perhaps with a committee on planning, having consulted the general parish community, describes its preferred future. The director then publishes this future in writing and, if possible, with priorities. Armed with this document, the director goes to those who are the various audiences of the local parish and asks for their gifts.

This approach has every opportunity of success: we have not begun, in the Catholic community, to approach persons in a responsible way asking for their substantial gifts. To cite one example, of the 250 persons we have buried from our parish over the past decade, only three have remembered the parish in their wills. With more encouragement and a better program in place, I would guess that at least one hundred of them would have left an average of $10,000 to the parish, and we would now have a million dollars that would have helped our ministry in many ways. While $10,000 may sound like a very high figure, it is about three percent of the average will probated in our community; but that is not the central point. Whether it is $10,000 or $1,000, we are missing a great resource for ministry—not because of the lack of charity of our parishioners, but because we are not presenting this possibility to them in an attractive way.

Recently, two middle-class parishioners have taken out insurance policies which name the parish as beneficiary. Each of these persons will be leaving the parish $15,000 for the work of its ministry.

This is the kind of work that the parish director of development would pursue: whether in the parish as a whole or in the school, the work is very much the same. Being in a parish position, however, there would be no danger of a separation of the school from the parish. This will be a direction that many parish communities will want to pursue.

Sacrificial Giving

This, in essence, is a tithing program. It has been well developed in the Diocese of Syracuse, New York: in its first two years there, forty-one parishes entered the program and they experienced an average growth in their Sunday collections of 47.9 percent.

The program for initiating sacrificial giving involves a specific plan of action, requires lay persons as speakers at the Sunday liturgies on two weekends, calls for some small group meetings, and involves some written material for parishioners. All of this has been put together in a

handbook or parish manual by Father Joseph Champlin. It is a 1982 publication called *Sharing Treasure, Time and Talent,* and it is published by The Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota.

Sacrificial giving does not stress planning for the future, but it is surely not inimical to such planning. This approach tells us that we owe our tithe to the Lord, that we are called to support the work of the Gospel and the care of the poor. Usually, it speaks of five percent being given to the local parish community and another five percent for other charities. Its approach does not prevent a parish from reflecting on its future, as it listens to the voice of the Holy Spirit, nor does it prevent the community from telling persons the ways in which their support will be used to further the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Sacrificial giving raises the ordinary Sunday income: it is surely possible to implement this program and, at the same time, to encourage parishioners to remember the parish in their wills. A given parish community might, for example, think of a three-year program in which sacrificial giving is the focus for the first year, developing a written plan of the preferred parish future is a focus for the second year, and the development of the program for wills and special gifts is the center of the third year's effort.

An Opportunity

Rather than looking at our financial problems as a cause of alarm or defeat, we should see this as another opportunity to grow as ministers of the Good News: we can help persons grow in generosity, be less attached to material wants, become more involved in the ministry of the Gospel and its various works, and we certainly can generate additional income for the ministry of our schools. Our present problem is an opportunity, not an obstacle.

It is clear that we do not have to cry "Wolf!" at this point in our parish and school life. We have a number of directions to pursue. Our inner-city and less affluent communities should also benefit from this work: we are a catholic community of faith and we extend beyond parish boundaries. As we generate more income in our suburban settings, we should plan and budget a portion of that income for parishes which need special assistance.

I have no doubt that the excellent pastoral leadership we enjoy in this country will seize the opportunity. We will certainly come to 1990 with parishes and schools on a much surer financial footing.

9

Conclusion

In these pages, we have reflected on the idea of the pastor as shepherd of the school community, with a special emphasis on the particular concerns which pastors have expressed about this aspect of their parish ministry.

These reflections come from personal experiences in ministry and they are colored by that experience. Within the shared experience of ministry in our country, there are hundreds and thousands of valuable experiences relating to any one of the points mentioned in these pages. If any of these ideas can become beginning points for discussion among those who minister together in the important area of school ministry, they will have served a valuable purpose. Whether these communities of ministry agree, disagree, or come to a new action reflection as a result of that discussion is of secondary importance. If these pages help persons who minister together come to their own consensus about the role of the pastor in the school ministry, his relationship with the principal, worship with children or any other area, this paper will have been well worth the effort.

If an individual pastor, reading these pages, finds new insight in his very challenging mission as a leader in the community of faith, this paper will have served a great purpose. Agreement or disagreement with particular ideas expressed a particular way is not so important in these pastoral areas. New insight is important.

The next ten years in Catholic education are rich in promise. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic educational community has been blessed with excellent leadership. Faced with a number of personnel, financial and attitudinal problems, Catholic educators have taken stock of themselves and their programs, analyzed their needs, set realistic goals, enlisted the help of valuable voluntary associates in their communities, and, step by step, they have brought continued improvement to their work and ministry. Catholic school leaders, amidst cries of despair and defeat, have led us in this ministry to a remarkable renaissance. That work of critical evaluation is not going to stop now. Names and faces will change, but the leadership will continue and Catholic education will be stronger ten years hence.

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